

# POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION CENTRES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

by

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PROFESSIONAL training, with its ever-spreading ripples from undergraduate to postgraduate to continuing education of family doctors and consultants, has come to be recognised as the essential core of good medicine. Sir George Godber, who retired at the end of November 1973 from his appointment as Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Health and Social Security, has stated that the postgraduate medical education development in regional hospitals in England and Wales has been the most significant advance in medical practice over the past two decades. The hospital and general practitioner commitment to the public and optimal postgraduate education and training are completely interdependent and cannot be considered in isolation. The accreditation of posts considered as suitable for general professional training for three years following the mandatory pre-registration year and for vocational professional training for the succeeding four years emanating from appropriate professional bodies – amended where necessary to the local scene – reflects the current trend in the interdependence between postgraduate medical education and training and the Health Service commitments to the public.

Adequate library facilities are a pre-requisite of a Postgraduate Medical Education Centre. There are libraries at the Postgraduate Medical Education Centres at Altnagelvin, Ballymena and Craigavon. These libraries were established by means of a grant of £15,000 payable over a period of five years, received by one of us (J.H.B.) from the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust. The last part of this grant was paid in September 1972. The library for the Belfast Postgraduate Medical Education Centre has been amalgamated with the adjacent library at the Medical Biology Centre of Queen's University. In future, these Postgraduate Medical Education Centre libraries will be funded by the Department of Health and Social Services (N.I.) and the development and administration will be undertaken by the Medical Library at the Institute of Clinical Science of Queen's University of Belfast. The libraries contain current text books, a selection of British and foreign professional journals and provide a photostat copy service. The annual expenditure on text books and journals in each of the Postgraduate Medical Education Centres is approximately £1,000 per annum. Because of limited accommodation, at present it is necessary to restrict the library facilities to medical and dental graduates. Hospital medical staff and general practitioners take full advantage of this valuable

service and have ready access to the library during the day and in the evenings. The Postgraduate Medical Education Centre libraries operate under the control of Miss Webster, the Medical Librarian of Queen's University. The administrative secretary of the clinical tutor at each centre is responsible for the day-to-day management of the library facilities.

There are four Postgraduate Medical Education Centres located in Ballymena, Belfast, Craigavon and Londonderry. These Centres are within the precincts of the area hospitals in the four areas controlled by the four Boards for Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland. They provide educational facilities for all hospital medical staff, general practitioners and dentists in the area and are under the direction of clinical tutors who are appointed by the Northern Ireland Council for Postgraduate Medical Education. In addition to those in charge of Postgraduate Medical Education Centres, clinical tutors have been appointed to the Mater Infirmorum Hospital, Royal Victoria Hospital and the Ulster Hospital.

Clinical tutors may receive an honorarium of up to £400 per annum. The token honorarium is not related to the work done and does not threaten the independence of the clinical tutor. Much of the work of the clinical tutor involves the willing collaboration of colleagues interested in postgraduate medical education. It is to the general advantage that clinical tutors should experiment and to some extent impose a personal stamp on the pattern of postgraduate medical education at their own Centres, without being too vulnerable to direction from above. Specialist tutors in general practice have also been appointed in each of the Centres. They do not receive an honorarium.

The members of the Ballymena and Belfast Postgraduate Medical Education Centres elect annually a Committee of Postgraduate Medical Education representing general practitioners, hospital medical staff and physicians in community medicine. This facilitates communications and encourages all doctors in the area to participate actively in postgraduate medical activities in the Centre. This Committee also arranges social functions for members of the Postgraduate Medical Education Centre.

The clinical tutor has the responsibility for the promulgation and direction of postgraduate medical education in his Centre. He co-ordinates postgraduate medical study and training arrangements for hospital medical staff and general practitioners. He is concerned with the postgraduate needs and interests of doctors in all specialities.

It is essential that the clinical tutor actively participates in postgraduate teaching. He must encourage and stimulate his colleagues to collaborate. He arranges lectures, clinico-pathological conferences, discussion groups, audio-visual presentation of illustrated tapes and selected medical films.

Four or five meetings sponsored by pharmaceutical firms are held each year in most Postgraduate Medical Education Centres. Arrangements for all sponsored meetings are made through the clinical tutor. Some vetting of lecture material and films is necessary. It is important that the clinical tutor arranges that an independent

opinion by a sufficiently experienced doctor on the topic should be available at such meetings. The acceptability or otherwise of a meeting to discuss a single product or group of products is at the discretion of the clinical tutor with the advice of the local Postgraduate Medical Education Committee. It is important to ensure that special attention be given to dissemination of knowledge about drugs. The Department of Therapeutics and Pharmacology of Queen's University has been very co-operative with the clinical tutors in facilitating all doctors who use drugs to have access to knowledge about the drugs they prescribe.

The clinical tutor also arranges refresher courses for general practitioners in co-operation with the Adviser in General Practice to the Northern Ireland Council for Postgraduate Medical Education. These courses may take the form of a one-day symposium on a suitable topic or an extended course of weekly lectures over a period of six to eight weeks.

Participation is the best method of learning and is the cornerstone of postgraduate medical education and training. The clinical tutor must therefore encourage junior hospital medical staff, registrars, consultants and general practitioners to take an active part at meetings held in the Postgraduate Medical Education Centre. It is very encouraging that many general practitioners are now prepared to present clinical cases and participate in meetings arranged by general practitioners for colleagues in general practice. Speciality tutors in general practice in the Postgraduate Medical Education Centres have played an important role in encouraging active participation by general practitioners. Participation is the best way to "ensure that learners learn".

*Postgraduate Clinical Tutors for 1973/74*

ALTNAGELVIN HOSPITAL	Mr. R. D. W. McLean
BELFAST CITY HOSPITAL	Mr. W. A. Hanna
CRAIGAVON HOSPITAL	Dr. A. W. Dickie
ROYAL VICTORIA HOSPITAL	Mr. G. W. Johnston
ULSTER HOSPITAL	Dr. J. K. Nelson
WAVENEY HOSPITAL	Dr. R. J. Kernohan
MATER HOSPITAL	Dr. J. C. Cooper